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## Single Combats in the *PVL* An Indo-European Comparative Analysis

The *Nestor Chronicle*, also known as the *Tale of Bygone Years* or *Primary Chronicle* (conventionally abbreviated as *PVL*), was compiled in Kiev at the beginning of the 12th century. To elaborate this account of the *origins* and *history* of Rus', the chroniclers of the day were obliged to rely on earlier written records – which were few and far between – as well as on whatever material that had been passed down by word of mouth.

The cultural setting for the *PVL* is that of the Eastern Slavs, who are related, both linguistically and culturally, to Indo-European. It seems plausible that, among the wealth of pseudo-historical material that characterises the *PVL*, Indo-European motifs arise. This supposition is supported by other and inherently distinct material, two instances of which we would like to cite here: in the thirteenth century, Snorri Sturluson in an Iceland Christianised two hundred years earlier, made free use of Germanic pagan material; a thousand years before, Livy wrote a history of Rome whose kings were revealed by Dumézil to be a reflection of an Indo-European (IE) pantheon.

In order to show that the IE motifs are present in the *PVL*, in the following pages we would like to analyze two of its legendary accounts in the light of other IE materials.

In the passage of the *PVL* corresponding to the year 993 A. D. (*sub anno* 6501 according to the *PVL*'s calendar) it is said that Prince Vladimir and his men encounter the Pechenegs. The two armies stand on opposite banks of the river Sula and neither side wants to cross the Trubež ford. Finally, the Pecheneg prince calls to Vladimir that they should each choose one man to fight in single hand-to-hand combat without weapons. If the Pecheneg representative loses, the Pechenegs will not attack for three years, but if the Pecheneg wins, they will make raids against the Rusians during the next three years. It does not take the Pechenegs long to find a big, strong warrior among their men, whereas Vladimir has a hard time finding a suitable opponent to fight against the giant Pecheneg. The next day an old tanner talks to Vladimir about his youngest son, who is extraordinarily strong, as he shows Vladimir by killing a bull with his own hands. When the moment of the single combat arrives, the giant Pecheneg laughs at the tanner's son because of his medium size. However, the youth

strangles the Pecheneg with his bare hands, and so the Pechenegs flee from the area. This passage of the *PVL* ends by saying that Vladimir founded the city of Perejaslavl' on that spot to commemorate the victory over the Pechenegs.

The city of Perejaslavl' is mentioned in the Greco-Russian treaty of 907 and, therefore, it is not very likely that it was founded in 993 by Vladimir, as it is stated in the *PVL*. Although the name of Perejaslavl' could have been inserted in the treaty *a posteriori*, it seems more plausible that the inaccuracy is in its use in the explicit of the passage recording the events of 993. Lixačëv (1996: 465) maintains that the treaty of 907 accurately mentions the already established Perejaslavl', however, he claims that the *PVL* passage of 993 proves that a narrative cycle regarding Vladimir was already emerging at the beginning of the twelfth century, when the *PVL* was compiled. According to Lixačëv, this legend was created to explain the origin of the city Perejaslavl'. However, the emergence of a particular legend regarding a city's origin does not necessarily postdate the establishment of a settlement: the order can be exactly the reverse, since very often identical legends are found about the origins of different cities. Legends about the 'origins' of cities or about any other kind of 'historical' events may exist independently and previous to the foundation of concrete cities or to the historical events to which they are ascribed after the fact.

Whether this legend was created as a consequence of the emergence of Perejaslavl', or if the legend was created to enrich the Vladimir cycle, or if the legend existed long before either of them, Vladimir and Perejaslavl' are merely names of anecdotal importance to the plot of the legend. The crux of the legend may have existed independently and simply been applied variously with the names, dates and geography changed and the details altered.

In the entry for the year 1022 A. D. (6530 according to *PVL* calendar) another single-handed combat is recounted: Prince Mstislav fights the Circassian Prince Rededja in order to resolve the confrontation between the two armies with the least amount of bloodshed. Once again, it is the Russians who win. In this case, the legend contains Christian religious elements, since Mstislav is said to have won the combat thanks to the intercession of the Virgin.

It goes without saying that the Christian propaganda is an added component to the core of the plot. Given that the *PVL* was compiled some 120 years after the official Christianization of Rus', and given that the real Christianization of the people was a much longer and complicated process than merely Vladimir's immersion in the Dnieper in 988, it is not improbable that, if there was an oral version of the legend inserted in the *PVL sub anno* 1022, the oral version did not originally include the miraculous intervention of the Virgin. It is also possible that this may have been an addition by the compiler or by the Christianized sector of the Russian population among whom the legend may have circulated – the nobility and those close to the prince seem to have accepted the religion of Byzantium quicker than the rest of the society<sup>1</sup>. It may even have been that the Christianized version of the tale existed only

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Poppe 1968, 1982 and Ščapov 1993.

among the nobility<sup>2</sup>. However, little is known with certainty about the origin of the legends inserted in the *PVL*, so any explanation would be mere supposition. It is enough to emphasize here that, as a folk legend or a legend for the elite, the presence of the Virgin that we find in this entry of the *PVL* was probably absent in its initial incarnation.

Single combats are a way of deciding who wins a war or confrontation without killing many men, since only one chosen representative from each side fights. The motif of the single combat appears in other traditions. Probably, the first example that comes up to mind is the one between David and Goliath (1 Samuel 17-18, or, in the Orthodox tradition, 1 Kings 17-18, henceforth referred to as *1 Samuel*). Among Indo-European narratives there are several single combats described. For this analysis I will focus on two that, at first glance, share some traits with both of the abovementioned passages of the *PVL*: the third book of the *Iliad* (henceforth referred to as *Iliad*) and the chapters 23 to 25 of the first book of *Ab urbe condita* (henceforth shortened to *Livy*).

The single combats related in the *PVL* have a much less complicated structure than the Latin and Greek accounts. However, it is not difficult to find parallels among them.

1. In all the cases, the fight among chosen representatives is shown as a peaceful alternative to war. This trait has been the filter in the selection of the narratives I analyze in this article.
2. In all the Indo-European narratives the initiative for the single combat arises from the leader<sup>3</sup> of the “other” side, that is, the enemy of the people from whose point of view the story is presented: in the *PVL* 993 it is the Pecheneg leader who suggests the single combat; in *PVL* 1022 it is Rededja; in the *Iliad* it is Paris who suggests fighting against Menelaus; and it is Hector, the defender of Troy, who relays Paris’ challenge to the Achaeans; in *Livy* it is Mettius, the Alban king, who proposes a less bloody solution for the confrontation. The single combat proposal is made by one

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<sup>2</sup> Soviet scholars frequently exaggerated the importance of popular oral literature, as well as its quality and quantity, and disdained the literature that originated among the social stratum of the elites – that is, among those around the prince and church men. Sometimes certain works have been classified as “folk” or “popular” oral literature, when in fact they were oral literature created by a minority. To a certain extent, I think that this is the case of the *PVL*.

<sup>3</sup> I use the words “leader,” “king” and “prince” interchangeably in this article. In each account a different term appears that has a specific connotation in each culture and era. However, for this analysis, what is important is the leading or ruling figure, no matter whether he is referred to as a king, prince, chief or any other name. Moreover, I consider that in the *Iliad* Hector and Paris both deserve to be considered leaders.

of the rank and file of the enemy troops and not by the leader only in the Biblical account. It is worth noting that in the 7th book of the *Iliad*, where another single combat is retold as well – the one between Hector and the Achaean Aias – it is Hector who challenges the enemy to find a man strong enough to fight him<sup>4</sup>.

3. In *PVL 993* and in *Livy* the leader delegates the danger of combat to one and three of his men, respectively. To the contrary, Mstislav and Paris each risk their own lives: in the accounts in *PVL 1022* and in the *Iliad* the enemy princes – Rededja of the Circassians and the Trojan Paris – suggest that they themselves, the leaders, should fight in single combat against their equal among their enemy.
4. In the case where it is not the leaders who are going to fight, there is the need to look for a fighter after the enemy's proposal. In Rome (*Livy*) this is not a problem, since three fighters are quickly found on each side, but in Rus' (*PVL 993*) there is a long search before the tanner's son appears on stage. In the Biblical account it also takes time to find David to fight Goliath.
5. In the Greek and Latin accounts there is great solemnity surrounding the acceptance of the treaty previous to the single combat and the consequences for the side that is to be defeated: oaths are taken and sacrifices are consecrated to the gods. In this sense both accounts of the *PVL* are by far less sophisticated: the enemy leader talks with the Russian leader; the latter accepts the proposal, and then the single combat follows. The only reference in the *PVL* to a divine being comes when, during the combat, Mstislav pleads to the Virgin for help and, afterwards, as promised, he commands the construction of a church dedicated in her honor. Although this detail may be functionally equivalent to the solemn oaths and sacrifices related in the Greek and Latin accounts, the Russian plea is not comparable to them. On the other hand, in *1 Samuel* there is no ritual confirmation of the acceptance of the conditions of the single combat.
6. In *PVL 1022* and in *Livy* it is explicitly stated that the combats are long and exhausting. However, in *PVL 993* as well as in the *Iliad*, the combats seem to be brief; regardless, neither account makes any reference to the length and weariness of the combat. On the other hand, David targets and kills the giant before the fight with Goliath has even begun.

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<sup>4</sup> However, this passage is not included in our analysis because this combat does not arise from the desire to avoid killing men, but for the mere pleasure of fighting.

7. In all of the single combats the winner or winners are the protagonists of the tale. I agree with Agamemnon – as he proclaims at the end of Book 3 (lines 456-457) – that the winner is Menelaus of the Achaeans, from whose point of view the *Iliad* is recounted. Had it not been for Aphrodite's intervention, Paris would have lost.
8. In the accounts where single combat ends in death, the losers are killed in the following ways: in *PVL* 993 the tanner strangles the giant Pecheneg with his bare hands; in *1 Samuel* Goliath dies when he is hit by a stone that David throws; in *PVL* 1022 Mstislav throws Rededja to the ground and stabs him in the throat; in *Livy* the only killing described in detail is that of the last of the three Curiatii brothers, whom Horatius stabs in the throat with his sword and then strips him.
9. After the end of the combat in the *PVL* 993 and *PVL* 1022, the treaty is immediately fulfilled: in 993 the Pechenegs flee Rus', which leads us to think that they, indeed, do not raid the country in the three years following (in fact, according to the *PVL*, the next attack does not happen until 997); and in 1022 Mstislav takes over Rededja's possessions and wife immediately and forces a tribute on the Circassians. In the Bible, as soon as Goliath is killed, the Philistines flee from the Israelites. In *Livy*, Mettius and the Albans submit themselves to Tullus' command immediately (although shortly thereafter the Albans fight against Rome again). In the *Iliad*, given that Menelaus is considered the winner, Agamemnon claims the booty, but the gods decide that the war should continue and therefore the treaty's conditions are not fulfilled. However, the outcome of the *Iliad* is a special circumstance as it is only through divine intervention that the protagonist Menelaus did not defeat Paris and that the treaty was not honored.
10. In *Livy* the corpses of the losers are solemnly treated. So, too, in the case of the *Iliad*, where, although in the combat between Paris and Menelaus there is no death, in general, the treatment of a corpse is solemn and tactful: in the abovementioned single combat between Hector and Aias (Book 7), when the conditions of the treaty are agreed upon, the stripping of the corpse is mentioned, but the body of the loser must be treated with respect and returned to his family. To the contrary, this point is not even mentioned in the *PVL* accounts or in *1 Samuel*.

Below is a table summarizing the five accounts, which provides a visual representation of the coincidences and differences among them.

	<i>PVL</i> 993	1 Samuel 17-18	<i>PVL</i> 1022	Iliad III	Livy 23-25
a) both sides are positioned, ready for battle	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
b) single combat to avoid battle	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
c) single combat proposed by the enemy – either by their leader or by a warrior	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
d) there is ritual conducted to confirm the treaty	no	no	no	yes	yes
e) treaty awards control over the loser's side to the winner	no	yes	yes	no	yes
f) treaty awards booty and the loser's wife to the victor	no	no	yes	yes	no
g) single combat fighters are the leaders of each side	no	no	yes	yes	no
h) the protagonists have trouble finding a volunteer to fight	yes	yes			no
i) the volunteer demonstrates or convinces the leader of his ability	yes	yes			no
j) the enemy's volunteer is giant and ugly	yes	yes			no
k) the protagonist's volunteer looks harmless because of his youth and "normal" build	yes	yes			no
l) the enemy's fighter laughs at his opponent	yes	yes	no	no	no
m) the single combat is long and exhausting	no	no	yes	n/a	yes
n) there is divine intervention	no	no	yes	yes	no
o) the winner throws the loser to the ground and stabs his throat with a knife or a sword	no	no	yes	n/a	yes
p) violence after victory: the enemy's flight, pursuit of the enemy	yes	yes	no	n/a	no

After reading both *PVL 993* and *PVL 1022* a question arises: what is the link between them? A plausible answer is that one of the accounts inspired the other, as it sometimes occurs among the *PVL* passages. However, other answers might be possible, as we will see at the end of this comparative analysis.

Let us focus first on *PVL 993*. Given its coincidences with the famous legend of David and Goliath, many experts defend its Biblical origin<sup>5</sup>. The aim of this article is

<sup>5</sup> The Biblical origin of this passage has been claimed for a long time. Among the most recent defenders is Danilevskij (1993: 86). Although critical of Danilevskij's readiness to

to highlight the IE elements present in the *PVL*, not the Biblical ones; however, a comparison with the Semitic legend will help us to reach conclusions about the link between the two *PVL* passages and, at the same time, about their own links to other IE narratives.

1 *Samuel* and *PVL 993* are almost identical not only in the general plot, but in the details as well. This is something we can see by comparing the first two columns in the table (the ones corresponding to *PVL 993* and 1 *Samuel 17-18*). In both narratives the two sides are positioned and ready for battle when the enemy suggests single combat as an alternative; the only difference at this point is that in *PVL 993* the proposal comes from the Pecheneg prince, whereas in 1 *Samuel* it is Goliath himself – one of the warriors – who issues the challenge. The reward for the winning side differs somewhat, since in 1 *Samuel* it consists of the supremacy over the loser, and in *PVL 993* the Pechenegs will raid the Rusians for three years if their champion wins or leave them in peace for three years if the Rusian wins. Both accounts mention the fear of the Rusians and the Israelites for the challenge of the Pechenegs and Philistines, respectively. In addition, in both cases it takes the protagonists longer to find a volunteer for the combat. In both narratives the volunteers are youths who are neither professional soldiers nor part of the war: David is a goat herder; the Rusian youth is a tanner who remained at home while his father and four brothers went off to fight. Both are the youngest in a family of boys and the sons of elderly fathers; their presence in the military camps is the result of their father's command. Both youths are interviewed by their king or prince, and both prove their worthiness for fighting in the single combat by killing beasts: the young tanner is tested in a fight against a bull, and David convinces Saul of his ability by describing the lions and bears he has killed. Both of their opponents are described as giant-sized men. When the single combat is about to start, the giants laugh at their young and little rivals. The combat itself is the part of the narratives more different among one another, although in both cases it is the youth who wins: David and Goliath fight armed, their bodies do not even touch, and Goliath dies when hit by the stone David has thrown, whereas in the *PVL* the fight is hand-to-hand, with no weapon, and the youth wins not because of his ability, but because of his physical strength. The reaction following the death of the giant is that the losing side flees in disorder and is chased by the winning side. After the victory, the youth is awarded some kind of honor by his prince – David remains to serve the king, and the young tanner is honored by Vladimir.

It is worth considering two details that make a difference between both narratives: the agreement on the conditions of the victory and the way in which the giant is killed. In *PVL 993* the Pecheneg prince offers a three-year truce if his man is defeated by the Rusian rival, and three years of raids if his man wins. It is perhaps noteworthy that the amount of time designated is three years, a recurring number in

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ascribe a Biblical origin to *PVL*'s passages elsewhere, Rančín-Lauškin (2001) agrees with him regarding the 993 passage.

IE narratives. Although no conclusions can be drawn from this fact – three is a special number among many other cultures apart from the IE – we must point out that in this case, the number three emerges precisely in a part of the plot where the *PVL* diverges most from the Bible. On the other hand, the manner in which the young tanner kills the Pecheneg – by strangling him with his bare hands, which differs from the Bible account – is reminiscent of one of the protagonists of the *Mahābhārata*, Bhima, who kills many enemies in the same way<sup>6</sup>. Although it is best not to draw conclusions from such isolated data, we must note that two details common with other IE narratives emerge in the *PVL* account precisely where it most differs from its Biblical source.

After contrasting *PVL 993* and *1 Samuel* there is little reason to doubt that the former borrowed heavily from the latter. Stender-Petersen (1934: 160-161) points out that *PVL 993* echoes the David and Goliath legend, but he rules out the hypothesis of a literary re-elaboration. He defends the theory that the Biblical legend would have been transmitted as an oral legend to the Varangians, who would have heard the legend during their long stays in Byzantium where they were surrounded by Christians and Hebrews. Consequently, Stender-Petersen claims that the legend would have reached Scandinavian soil – where there are numerous accounts of single combats – via Rus' through the Varangians<sup>7</sup>.

Whether the legend inserted *sub anno 993* into the *PVL* was acquired from the Varangians, or from the Old Testament readings known to the monks and higher social strata, or from a folk tale that perhaps originated in the contacts of the Russian population with Christians or Hebrews, it mirrors the Biblical legend. Whatever *PVL* details diverge from the Biblical account may be the result of Indo-European interferences.

Having analysed *PVL 993* and *1 Samuel*, and let us turn now to the other accounts. We see from the table that the almost complete coincidence that we observed between *PVL 993* and *1 Samuel* does not occur among the other tales. However, the three first rows, which summarize the plot of the five accounts, coincide. It could be recapitulated as: “combat between chosen representatives of two hostile sides is suggested by the antagonists in order to avoid massive bloodshed”.

After having seen the coincidences between *PVL 993* and *1 Samuel*, it is noteworthy that the coincidences between the two of them and *PVL 1022* are not many. On the contrary, *PVL 1022* shares more parallels with *Livy* or with the *Iliad* than with *PVL 993* or with *1 Samuel*. Putting aside the first three rows, the next instance where *PVL 1022* coincides with *1 Samuel* and *PVL 993* is in the absence of any kind of ritual proceeding for the acceptance of the conditions accorded the victor of the single combat, which is a detail present in both *Livy* and the *Iliad*. Row (e) reflects that the conditions of the treaty are somewhat vague in *1 Samuel*, *PVL 1022* as

<sup>6</sup> I would like to thank N. Allen for calling my attention to this detail.

<sup>7</sup> Rus' was a regular stop for the Varangian mercenaries on their way to and from Byzantium.



well as the *Iliad*. However, row (f), which reflects another condition of the treaty, supplies an interesting parallel exclusive to *PVL 1022* and the *Iliad*: the reward for the winner is the wife and the goods of the loser explicitly: Mstislav can take the wife, children and possessions of Rededja and control the Circassians, and if Menelaus wins, he will recover his wife and the riches that the Trojans took when they abducted her. Helen's role in the *Iliad* cannot be compared to that of Rededja's unnamed wife, but the fact that she is distinguished as an important part of the booty might suggest that there is a similarity between the two accounts. The next row is interesting as well, because it reflects another parallel exclusive to *PVL 1022* and the *Iliad*: the volunteer fighters are the princes themselves, whereas in the other accounts, the combat is assigned to the soldiers. Consequently, rows (h), (i), (j) and (k), which refer to the details surrounding the search and selection of the fighters, are blank for the columns of *PVL 1022* and the *Iliad*. At the same time, they show the complete divergence of *PVL 993* and *1 Samuel* from *Livy*.

Row (l) highlights the contrasts between the group formed by *PVL 1022*, the *Iliad*, and *Livy* versus *1 Samuel* and *PVL 993*. Moreover, row (m) shows a similar opposition between the two groups, although it not as clear, since the *Iliad* lacks specific information in the text – although, as mentioned above, it looks as if the combat did not take very long. The next row refers to divine intervention and it presents another parallel exclusive to *PVL 1022* and the *Iliad*; however, it must be clarified. On the one hand, the type of divine intervention is different: Aphrodite appears and takes Paris away surrounded by a mist, whereas, in *PVL 1022* Mstislav invokes the help of the Virgin and she gives him the strength to win. On the other hand, as I said before (cf. *supra*), the invocation to the Virgin in *PVL 1022* is possibly a later detail that was added to the core of the legend. However, at this point of the comparison, we must ask ourselves if the invocation to the Virgin made by Mstislav was a completely new element that was added to the legend, or whether, perhaps, there was an invocation to a non-Christian divinity that was replaced by that to the Virgin. This hypothesis can by no means be proven; nonetheless we think that it is a possibility that must be considered<sup>8</sup>.

Row (o) refers to the kind of death that the loser suffers, and once again the opposition of *PVL 993* and *1 Samuel* to the rest of the accounts is clear, although the manner of death differs. On the contrary, in *PVL 1022* and in *Livy* the winner kills the

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<sup>8</sup> In Celtic material there is a single combat that has not been included in the analysis because it diverges too much from the texts analyzed here. For example, in the Celtic account, the combat is proposed by the protagonist and the winner is the antagonist. This account of single combat is in *Math son of Mathomny*, which is one of the legends that appear in the *Mabinogion* (cf. Gantz 1976: 97-117). It is worth mentioning here because the winner of the single combat, Gwydyon, defeats Pryderi “by reason of strength and skill and magic and enchantment” (Gantz 1976: 103). It is necessary to emphasize that, although no mention is made of any divinity (neither Christian nor pagan), it is a supernatural element (magic and spells) that provides Gwydyon with victory. This could indeed be a parallel found in the Celtic narrative, *PVL 1022*, and the *Iliad*.

loser by throwing him to the ground and stabbing his throat with a knife (*PVL 993*) or sword (*Livy*). In the *Iliad* Menelaus does not get to kill Paris because of Aphrodite's help, but in that moment when she intervenes, Menelaus was about to drag him to the Achaeans' side and strangle him with a belt. The kinds of death are not similar, but there is a common element in the accounts: the throat as the weak point in the loser's body. The last row shows another coincidence in the *PVL 993* and *1 Samuel* as opposed to the other narratives; obviously, this row remains blank for the *Iliad* because of the absence of an unequivocal result in the combat between Menelaus and Paris.

### Conclusion

At the beginning we raised the question about the link between *PVL 993* and *PVL 1022*. Our analysis has shown that *PVL 993* recreates the Biblical account of David and Goliath with a high degree of accuracy. However, it has also shown that *PVL 1022* has more traits in common with other Indo-European accounts than with *PVL 993* or with *1 Samuel*, and therefore, *PVL 993* and *PVL 1022* do not seem to be a reflection of one another. Although we are aware that this conclusion is rather unexpected, we think that it should be reconsidered whether, as it has sometimes been thought, *PVL 993* inspired *PVL 1022*<sup>9</sup>, and, in general, what the relationship is between the two legends.

It seems clear that there is some kind of relationship between *PVL 1022*, the *Iliad* and *Livy*, especially between the first two. The third, *Livy*, contains a peculiarity – combat by three participants. This legend supplied Dumézil (1971: 30) with material for a comparison with the Indian tradition: the murder of Tvaṣṭṛ's three-headed son either by Indra or by Indra and Trita Āptya (the Vedic hymns are not clear on this point), which is narrated in the Mahābhārata. Trita is understood as the 'third,' that is, the third of three Āptya brothers, and what happens is that 'the third kills the triple' (Dumézil 1971: 30), which recalls the events enacted by the surviving Horatius. In India as well as in Rome, the winner commits a dishonorable act for which he must purify himself, which is a motif completely absent in the *PVL* accounts as well as the *Iliad*. *Livy* is, therefore, a special case among the combats compared in this analysis.

The parallels between *PVL 1022* and the *Iliad* are more numerous and important than the ones between them and *Livy*. Regarding the *Iliad* and *PVL 1022*, according to the expert's view<sup>10</sup>, we must rule out the option of the importation of Homer's work into Rus', that is to say: there was no chance of borrowing from the *Iliad* to *PVL*. Therefore, it is difficult to propose a hypothesis to explain the similarities between the two accounts. If the experts are right and Classical works were not known in Rus', i.e.,

<sup>9</sup> Stender-Petersen (1934: 163).

<sup>10</sup> Thomson (1999) asserts that in the few cases where Homer was cited in Rus', it is merely his proper name that is mentioned and nothing was known about his work. Franklin (2002) is not as strict, but recognizes the general ignorance of Classical antiquity in Kievan Rus'.

if the borrowing hypothesis is not valid, we are left with one sole option that seems to explain the parallels reasonably: the genetic hypothesis.

According to the genetic hypothesis, we must conclude that the core of the legends in the *Iliad* and *PVL 1022* are common and heirs of a previous legend, a kind of ancient pattern-legend that is reproduced in both traditions – the Greek and the Slavic – with certain modifications. Modifications are acceptable given the differences between the two cultures in which the legend is retold and given the time gap existing from the moment when they were written down.

Whether the hypothesis of a common origin is acceptable or not, one conclusion cannot be denied: regardless of how the legend reached twelfth-century Rus', *PVL 1022* reflects an Indo-European motif.

One last point must be made. We have analysed one Biblical legend and four Indo-European ones. Clearly, though, one of the four shows evidence of Biblical influences. However, all five legends do have traits in common. As we see in the table, *1 Samuel* coincides with *Livy* at various points – and other combats are described in *Livy* that are very close to *1 Samuel* as well<sup>11</sup>. Since the pre- and post-Zoroaster Iranian influence in the Judaeo-Christian tradition is a very complicated and as yet unresolved question, we must leave the door open to the possibility of an Indo-European influence on Semitic material and, therefore, to the possibility of having analyzed five accounts of, at the very least, a common origin.

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<sup>11</sup> We have in mind the battles against the Gauls in Book 7 of *Ab urbe condita*. Thanks to Nick Allen for pointing this out to me, as well as for mentioning the possibilities of IE Iranian influences in the Bible.

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### *Abstract*

Inés García de la Puente

*Single Combats in the PVL. An Indo-European Comparative Analysis*

In the *PVL*, there are two accounts of single hand-to-hand combat. The first reportedly takes place between a young tanner and a giant Pecheneg *sub anno* 993, the second between prince Mstislav and Rededja *sub anno* 1022. In the present article each narrative is compared to Greek and Latin accounts as well as to a Biblical one. The coincidences found in the comparison of all five narratives lead to the conclusion that such parallels cannot be coincidental, and that the possibility of a common genetic origin must be considered.